Universidad del Este

School of Social Science and Humanities

**Short Story: Old Ghosts**

Christian De León Casillas

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**Synopsis**

Jimmy Brennan is our main character in *Old Ghosts*; a short story by A. J. McKenna. Jim is an old man that doesn't like the modern life because that makes him feel lonely. He sees the ghost of his lost love, Ellen Kelly. In his seventy-six birthday he is doing the usually, he goes to the market and on his way back, he remembers his youth with Ellen. When they were adolescents their love and respect for each other burned in their hearts; their love was pure and innocent.

Ellen was catholic and she followed its teachings and beliefs; that the flesh its reserved for marriage bed. In a party with Jim father's friends, Jim met a blonde twenty years old girl that seduced him; she took advantage of his drunkenness, but part of him wanted to play along. Jim left Ellen the next day telling her that he didn't want her anymore; he left with the blonde girl. One year later, aware of the mistake he did, he returned only to find out that Ellen got ill with tuberculosis and died.

After Ellen's death, Jim became a solitary and melancholic man; he never dated another woman ever because he felt guilty. In the day that Jim had all these memory flashbacks, which was his seventy-six birthday, at night he died and was reunited with Ellen in the afterlife. Ellen was waiting for him all this time and they at last were together.

**Biography**

A.J McKenna

A native of Cavan, Andrew Joseph McKenna seems to have come to Belfast c1860 and made his home at #5 Athol Terrace, near Durham Street. In July 1862 he was appointed editor of the 'Ulster Observer', newly founded by the Belfast Catholic Institute at #2 Hercules Place. It was tri-weekly and priced at one penny...

McKenna proved himself to be an able journalist but within two years, friction began to develop between himself and the proprietors over management of the paper, a situation aggravated by the fact that some members of the institute questioned Bishop Dorrian's rights of episcopal authority. McKenna and the Bishop quarreled and eventually in 1868, the paper closed.

Within one month, McKenna started the 'Northern Star' and 'Weekly Observer' at #36 Arthur Street, this also being a tri-weekly. In 1869 he was awarded £250 libel damages against two of his former colleagues who had founded the 'Ulster Examiner' as a counter-measure to his newspaper.

The intense acrimony only began to subside after the 'Northern Star' ceased publication in November 1872, a matter of months after McKenna's sudden death. Ironically, the 'Ulster Examiner' (the lately defunct 'Irish Weekly') then tacked on to its title, that of the 'Northern Star'.

Andrew Joseph McKenna who had married Catherine, a daughter of Edward McHugh, linen merchant, of Rosemary Street, moved to Millbank House, Victoria Road, Holywood c1871. A staunch and fearless liberal in his outlook all his life, his funeral was a most impressive affair starting from St.Patrick's Church, Holywood and followed by several thousand mourners including Bishop Dorrian and Rev. J O'Laverty the noted historian and Parish Priest of Holywood...

**Analysis**

In *Old Ghosts* story we can detect the following literary theories: structuralism, time travel theory, phenomenology and ill give my point of view through the reader's response. Jim is a very antique man, he wasn't in accordance with the modern life. His moral and beliefs are based on what he learned in his time. He did things the way he was taught no matter what time he lived in, this is proof of structuralism. The story takes place in Jim's memories, on how was his life with his lost love Ellen Kelly, these are signs of the time travel theory. Jim felt guilty about Ellen's death and because of this he became a solitary and melancholic man that is absorbed by his inner thoughts. This is phenomenology, his melancholic personality and pangs of conscience proves it.

Our main character in *Old Ghosts*, Jim Brennan was an seventy-six old man which followed a structure learned in his time. He evaded the supermarkets because they were too complicated, too crowded and too modern; he instead preferred mini markets. He despised the fashion of the era and modern life. Men wearing rings in their ears, young girls with short skirts, things that was not seen in his time. He think that these men rape with their eyesight and that the girls in miniskirts were short just of sin and making promises. He also notice that people are not sincere anymore, that they speak with polite lies. Jim preferred doing things the old way instead of adapting to the modern life; he despised and criticized it, we could call this structuralism. We can deduce that he lived his life based on a structure learnt from his parents and grandparents.

Time travel theory can also be applied to this story, because the story takes place in the main character's past. In the whole story, in the present time, he is just remembering how was his life through the years with his love Ellen Kelly and the tragedy that happened. While inside the memories of the main character, time keeps year by year. The author points out the age of Ellen that had at that time, that way we know how much time had passed from a scene to another.

Throughout the story Jim felt guilty about the death of Ellen because he left her when she was ill. Even though Jim didn't killed her or occasioned the cause. Ellen died because of tuberculosis. The fact that he left her at a crucial time makes him thinks that she lost her means to live, to fight her sickness. After her death he became solitary and melancholic, always thinking in the past. absorbed in inner thoughts. He didn't go out with another girl in his life, thus showing the respect that Ellen deserved. Because of these facts I could denominate this in phenomenology, his guilt-feeling and personality clarify it.

The fact that Jim could see Ellen's ghost made him think that he was responsible for her death. Also, he thought that she lost her means to live when he left her. Another thing that haunted his consciousness were his last words to her, ''No. I don't want you'', when that was not true. In my point of view, Ellen began following Jim after death as a second chance, to see if he was really worthy of her love, like testing his faithfulness; if he passed her test, she would forgive him and allow him to be reunited with her in the afterlife.

Somewhat the author is male chauvinist. He portraits the female character, Ellen, as an inferior being. While she had to be pure, innocent and faithful, the male character, Jim, didn't had to; he could do whatever he wanted to. She being the character that died because of an illness are signs that she was weak and dependent. Dying right after when Jim left means, that she was incapable of living by herself, that she needed a man by her side. Ellen needed more personality, strength and aggressiveness. However, according to this story and how the author place the characters, women are dependents beings, that they need a loving man by their side, while the man can live out with any women.

**Reference**

A.J McKenna, (2000, Augusts) Old Ghosts*, Short Stories*, Retrieved March 23, 2011 from : <http://www.eastoftheweb.com/short-stories/UBooks/OldGhos.shtml>

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